



हिन्दुत्वम्

AUM HINDUTVAM

A handbook of Hindu Dharm



Swami Purnanandaji

THE DIVINE CREATOR
Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj
(1896-1941)



Founder - Bharat Sevashram Sangha

AUM
SANGHA BAANI
MESSAGE FOR THE HUMANITY

1. What is the Goal?
Self-Realization, Universal Emancipation.
2. What is Religion ?
*Self-sacrifice, Self-abnegation, Self-discipline
Adherence to Truth, Continence.*
3. What is real Death ?
Forgetfulness of the 'Self'
4. What is real Life?
Self-possession, Self-remembrance, Self-consciousness.
5. What are real Virtues?
Heroism, Virility, Manliness, Aspiration of Emancipation.
6. What are real Sins ?
Weaknes, Fear (Defeatism), Cowardice, Meanness, Selfishness.
7. What are real sources of Strength ?
Patience, Fortitude, Endurance.
8. What are real Assets ?
Self-confidence, Self-reliance, Self-respect.
9. What are real Enemies?
*Indolence, Slumber, Procrastination, Inertia,
Lustful senses & passions.*
10. What are real Friends?
Energy, Initiative, Enthusiasm, Perseverance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - PREFACE

Param Poojya Srimat Swami Purnanandaji Maharaj - founder of the Western Branches of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha in London - England, Trinidad, Guyana Sevashram Sangha, the famous Hindu College, America Sevashram Sangha and the Canada Sevashram Sangha came to the Caribbean in the early 1950s.

He was a member of the Cultural Mission which was sent out by the Bharat Sevashram Sangha Calcutta - India to visit and preach to immigrant Indians who settled in large numbers as indentured labourers in countries like Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, Surinam and Guyana. After visiting South East Asian countries, Africa and Europe, the Mission arrived in the Caribbean in the mid-50s.

It was the hands of Providence which chartered the course of that wonderful missionary journey of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. Due to poverty and only for the survival of daily bread, these indentured labourers were cut off from Mother India for more than a hundred years, and Hindus in particular, were under pressure to become converted to other religions by various covert and other means. Up till then, these descendants of Indian origin had never seen a "Swami" and never knew who was a "Sannyasi".

Swami Purnanandaji Maharaj, heroic, dynamic and learned Hindu-monk, was left in the Caribbean and as a result he spent more than thirty seven years of his life looking after the spiritual, social and educational needs of the Hindus. He established in Guyana, *the First Hindu College, First Hindu Primary School, First Gurukul system -Dormitory for boys and together with Sri Bhadase Maharaj established primary and secondary schools in Trinidad.*

It was during this period, in spite of his busy life, Poojya Srimat Swami Purnanandaji Maharaj wrote the "**AUM HINDUTVAM**" which means "Thou art a Hindu" in order to re-awaken the Hindu consciousness in the domiciled Indians. It helped them to have a better understanding of their religion and culture, to develop their strength of belief and assert their cultural identity. Guruji is also the author of Patanjali Yoga Sutra,

Bhagavad Gita, The Hindu Catechism, and Prophet of a New Hindu Age.

Hindus outside India are beginning to become aware of the problems they have to face, particularly in relation to their children. This is one of the areas in which "*Aum Hindutvam*" can be helpful. It can be conveniently used by parents to teach their children some basic things about their religion. This will help them to participate in discussions and debates rather than being silent spectators or being preached to. Finally, I would like to leave with our readers the Author's final declaration of : What is Prayer? "*Prayers are not wishes, nor beggars pleas for Alms, nor whispering meant for human ears, not nice displays of grandiose words and vocal charms. Prayers are quiet communion wherein man speaks and God listens or God speaks and Man listens.*"

- Swami Bhajananda

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FIJI SEVASHRAM SANGHA

6 Bau Street, Suva.

Ph: (679) 331 7625 Fx: (679) 330 2210

10 Nasoki Street, Lautoka.

Ph: (679) 666 4447, 664 0420 Fx: (679) 666 5764

Email: fijisevashramsangha@yahoo.com

Our Publication

SANGHA VANI

Email: sanghavani@gmail.com

HINDU RELIGION

Q. Why is your religion called Sanatan Dharma?

A. Because it has not been started by any particular personality but is founded on some eternal truths which hold good forever, for example:

(a) God is Sat, Chit, Anand, meaning Truth, Consciousness and Blissfulness, which are eternal.

(b) The innermost spirit of man, which is his true existence, is beyond change and, therefore, eternal. The changing part of man's being are his fine and physical bodies.

(c) Our dharma is not an organised religion which depends upon certain creeds. On the other hand our dharma is determined in accordance with the character of the people-individually and collectively.

(d) Our scriptures say that: "Ekam Sat Bipra Bahudhaa Baddanti" (Rig Veda) meaning. God is one, yet different people call him by different names.

(e) All men, in their essence, are equal.

(f) All religions lead to the same goal.

(g) The doctrine of karma meaning - as you sow so shall you reap, which is nothing but the eternal law of causes and effects.

(h) The doctrine of Maya means the transitory nature of the world which is sometimes deceptive and which is by itself not independent.

(i) The doctrine of transmigration of souls or rebirth. This is based on the doctrine of Karma. Man has to be born again and again until he has been able to free himself from all desires.

(j) God, being all-powerful, can, if He likes, incarnate Himself at different times in different parts of the world.

(k) Devotion to parents, guru and husband is a very important teaching of Hinduism. This is also a universal truth because obedience to elders lies in the very nature of man.

(l) Unity in diversity - by this Hindus believe that in all the diverse phenomena of the world, there is a unifying factor - Universal Soul,

Q. What is harm when a religion is founded by a particular personality?

A. After a time, should the events in the life of that personality be proved something different from how people believed before, then the whole structure of that religion will be at stake.

Q. Who are these personalities like Rama and Krishna?

A. They are God incarnates or Avatars, who have contributed much to the progress of Hinduism. Though the value of their contribution is immeasurable yet the existence of the Hindu religion never depends upon them.

Q. If there is no founder of Hindu religion then how did it start?

A. In the beginning of each cycle of creation some wise persons who are very much elevated from previous creations and whom the Hindus call Maharishi are born, In their samadhi or close contact with God, divine knowledge, both secular and spiritual, dawns upon them. Such knowledge is called Vedas, which in turn give rise to Hinduism.

Q. How did the name 'Hindu' come?

A. The Western invaders of India in ancient times used to call the inhabitants of the Eastern side of the Sindhu river (Indus river) 'Hindus', the word Hindu has a geographical significance, but according to Sir Radha Krishnan, it has now a more cultural significance than a geographical one.

CREATION

Q. Are there many creations and dissolutions?

A. Yes, according to the Vedas there are many creations and dissolutions, and with every dissolution, seeds are left for the new cre-

ation. Creation means variation, for all seeds cannot be equal.

Q. Who has created the universe, God or Nature (Prakriti)?

A. God has created the universe but through Nature. The whole creation has come out of Him, and Him alone.

Q. Where was man first created?

A. In Trivastaba, which is now Tibet, on the north of India (according to Hindu belief).

Q. Who were first created?

A. Seven great sages Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vashishta. And 4 sages; Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanatkumar. And fourteen Manus. All men are born of them. (Gita 10:6)

Q. How did creation become possible?

A. Before creation, God was alone, Who may be termed as Absolute or Impersonal God, who is Abaammanasagochara (Who cannot be thought of or spoken of). In that Absolute state, a kind of vibration was felt which in turn brought forth the pirmal Sound or Word - Om. Thoughts for creation such as. "Let there be light and there was light, "ekoham bahusyam", came in the divine mind. That is how the creation became possible.

Q. How did creation start?

A. Creation started with Chaos or Matter-not-solidified

Q. How long did the unsolidified matter take to get solidified?

A. Thousands of years.

Q. What is the process of creation?

A. God then created space (Aakaasha); from space, wind was created; from wind, fire; from fire, water, the earth; from the earth, herbs, from herbs, food; from food, person (Yajurveda Taittiriya Upanishad 1-2-1). The sun, the moon, the heaven and the other regions and everything else were created as in previous creations.

Q. What is the process of dissolution?

A. Just opposite to the process of creation.

Q. After creating everything, did God remain aloof from the created things?

A. No. Having created them, He entered into the created things. (Chhandogya Upanishad 6-3).

Q. Is God in everything?

A. Yes, God or Brahman or Atman is in everything.

Q. If God is in everything, then have all things been created alike?

A. No. Though God is in everything, they have been created differently, if there is no diversity there is no creation.

Q. How have men been created superior to other things or beings?

A. In reasoning and in feeling. Besides, man's constitution has been created differently. From that stand-point man is superior to others.

Q. What is mind?

A. Mind is the finest portion of food-stuff.

Q. What is intellect or buddhi?

A. Buddhi is the culminating stage of the mind, and above intellect is Ataman.

Q. Do the elements, viz., earth, water, fire, air space remain unmixed from each other all through?

A. No. They are mixed with each other.

Q. In what proportion are they mixed?

A. This is the proportion: Subtle water, for example, comprises-subtle water 1/2, subtle earth 1/8, subtle fire 1/8, subtle air 1/8, subtle space 1/8, (From Vichaar Chandrodaya)".

Q. What is the age of creation?

A. The Western people according to the Bible believe that creation is only 6,000 years old. But with the scientific discoveries and the unearthing of some ancient relics, people have started to believe that man lived in this world quite a few million years before. The date of creation, according to orthodox Hindu view, is much more ancient. The question still remains open, for something may in future throw some more light on this matter.

GOD (Ishwara / Bhagwan)

Q. Who is God ?

A. God is the creator of this universe. He is the sustainer and in Him the universe will merge after dissolution. He is all-pervading and indivisible.

Q. What are the attributes of God?

A. All existence, all consciousness; all bliss (Sat, Chit, Anand),

Q. Does God know everything?

A. Yes, God knows everything, nothing that comes in our mind can be hidden from Him.

Q. How can we please God?

A. By prayer and by performing our duties.

Q. Where is God?

A. God is everywhere.

Q. How can we know God?

A. By being free from all desires.

Q. When we see immense suffering in this world, can we say God is impartial?

A. Suffering comes according to one's own actions or Karma, and not due to God's partiality.

Q. If we are to suffer or enjoy according to our own actions, how can we then benefit by prayer to God?

A. Prayer to God will inspire us towards good actions.

Q. If God is everywhere, why do we not see Him?

A. There are two reasons why we cannot see God:

(1) Due to our ignorance,

(2) The more something is fine the more difficult it is to see it, e.g. air, atom, etc. God being the finest and largest of all is not seen except with the eyes of wisdom.

Q. If God is everything, why do things perish?

A. Only the Mayic parts of things perish:

(1) Naam (Name), (2) Roop (Form), (3) Sat (Existence),

(4) Chit (Consciousness), (5) Anand (Blissfullness).

The first two which belong to Maya, perish while the other three, which are one with God, never change.

Q. Who are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva?

A. They are respectively creative force, preserving force and destructive force of the same Almighty God.

Q. Do the Hindus worship idols?

A. No, Hindus never worship idols. But some Hindus, according to the stages of their spiritual life, use idols as symbols. As a matter of fact, almost everybody, Hindus or non-Hindus, use some kind of symbol during the time of worship. A church is also a symbol. According to Mahatma Gandhi, taking help of symbols in times of worship is almost unavoidable and it is in the nature of every human being.

Q. Do the Hindus worship many gods?

A. It may appear that the Hindus worship many Gods, but the real position is different. Each god when worshipped, is conceived as the manifestation of the one Almighty God. In philosophical term this may be called Henotheism. Propitiation of these divine manifestations who are in human forms assists the worshipper enormously

in acquiring godly qualities like, spirit of sacrifice, patience, concentration and then love for God which are absolutely necessary to realise that One.

Without this sort of gradual process one can hardly think of an Infinite God with a finite mind, or like Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapt.xi) the worshipper will be frightened even if the Great God appears before him with His-all-powerful glamour.

Q. What is Shiva-linga Puja?

A. As the Hindu way of life demands propitiation of each Power of God, so is the worshipping of the Generative Power of God.

Q. Is there any other religion where this system prevails?

A. Oxford Dictionary mentions, "Symbol of generative Power in nature is venerated in various religious systems, specially in the Dionysion Festivals in ancient Greece."

Q. Why then some people criticise Hindus for Shiva-linga Puja?

A. Well, it is not difficult to discover evil anywhere if one is determined to see it. Look to the following remarks of Mahatma Gandhi: "It was in a Missionary (Christian) book that I first learned that Shiva-lingam has any obscenity at all..."

Q. Anyway, Lord Siva is god of Destruction, though Creative Force of God is attributed to Brahma, not to Siva. How in the Siva-linga Puja Lord Siva is reversed? Hindu Religion is really confusing.

A. Yes. Hinduism is already confusing, and it will be more so, if you want to understand everything from a booklet like this.

INCARNATION OF GOD

Q. Do the Hindus believe in the incarnation of God?

A. Yes.

Q. What is the idea of this doctrine?

A. God, being all-powerful and merciful, can take form for the

good of humanity .in different ways and in different ages (Gita 4:8).

Q. Does God's power not become limited when He takes birth in space and time?

A. No. He remains the same all-powerful God even though He takes human form. It has been stated in the Gita, fourth chapter sixth verse, that He controls the Maya when He takes form so that Maya cannot touch Him.

Q. Why the Hindus do not believe in only one incarnation?

A. There are two reasons for that:

(1) The mission of the limitless infinite God cannot be completed in one incarnation:

(2) Each incarnation of God fulfills the demand of that time. So, when the time changes, some other personality will be needed to fulfill the purpose of the changed circumstances.

AUM

Q. What is "Aum"?

A. "Aum" is the Pranava or Word-God (probably, corresponding to the logos of Christian Theology) and the nearest and dearest name of God.

Q. How is the word "Aum" constituted?

A. "Aum" is a Sanskrit word. Though there are three letters in "Aum", it is nothing but the prolonged sound of 'A' (ah). That means 'A' and "Aum" are identical.

The first vowel 'A' (ah) is not only the first letter of the Sanskrit language but of all languages. This primal sound "A" has started before the creation and has been continuing and will continue in all time to come. All sounds from whichever source they come to us, come out from that one primal source "A" but the sounds differ due to different mediums through which they pass, as we see in the piano, one single sound coming out differently due to its passing

through different reeds.

The primal sound can be heard by a perfect Yogi within himself. Everything in this world has a name, and the 'name' and the 'named' (the thing or person possessing the name) are one and the same. Without 'name' you cannot think of anything. This 'name' is wrapped up in that primal sound 'Aum', So the conclusion comes that everything is pervaded by 'Aum', and the all-pervading thing is nothing but God, so 'Aum' is identical with God.

SOUL

Q. What is Soul?

A. Soul is the innermost part and true existence of being. Without soul, body and mind cannot work.

Q. What is Jewaatmaa and what is Paramaatmaa?

A. Jewaatmaa is individual soul, while Paramaatmaa is collective or universal soul, that means God. God is manifested within the cage of Jeewa, that is subtle body and physical body.

Q. What is the link between individual soul and collective soul?

A. Individual soul is part and parcel of collective soul or God. Individual soul is small. Universal soul is vast; the difference is in degree but in nature both are same.

Q. What is the difference between soul, body and mind?

A. Soul is the container or support while body and mind are the contents.

Q. What is the difference between life- breath and soul?

A. Life-breath protects the body alone while soul supports the whole being. Again, the life-breath is dependent upon the soul, while the soul is independent.

Q. What is the speciality of the soul with regard to the body and the mind?

A. The body and mind change and decay while the soul does not.

Q. Does death affect the soul in any way?

A. No, for the soul is finer than the finest.

Q. Then, how can one know the soul?

A. By Vichaar or analysing the body, the mind and the soul, and discovering the distinct nature of each of them.

Q. By such analysis what conclusion can one arrive at?

A. The conclusion will be this: You are the soul; you are neither body nor mind. You are mere witness, and you remain unaffected by the action of body and mind. You are constant in childhood, youth and old age. You in your true existence as soul, are 'Existence', 'Consciousness' and 'Blissfulness' (Sat, Chit, and Anand).

BIRTH AND DEATH

Q. What is birth?

A. The entering of soul or jeewaatma in a new body is birth.

Q. What is death?

A. The destruction of the physical body is death.

Q. How many kinds of bodies are there in the human life?

A. There are three kinds, viz., physical body, fine body and casual body.

Q. What happens during death?

A. The physical body of flesh, blood and bone perishes. The fine body coming out from the physical body remains in the atmosphere and moves near the dead body for a length of time due to its attraction towards it. And the casual body takes birth or starts its functions immediately.

Q. Which is better, cremation or burial, and why?

A. As long as the fine body can remember the physical body, it will have attachment towards it. So, the quicker the physical body is forgotten the better for the fine body, for it then can proceed to take a new birth, and for that reason cremation is better than burial.

In burial there will be more chances of the soul being attached to the dead body.

Q. Does the fine body improve after death?

A. It may improve or retard according to its karma, but from the point of broader principles of evolutionary process, it can be said it progresses.

Q. What happens to us before death?

A. The mind will stay only on a few things for which one has more attachment, and just at the time of death one single dominating thought remains, and as life ends, that last thought will determine the future life (Gita 8:6).

Q. What is fine body or Shukshma Sharira?

A. Fine body comprises mind, intellect, feeling and egotism (four functions of the mind), finer portions of the five working organs (hands, feet, etc.), and five knowledge organs (eye, nose, etc.), and five kinds of winds that work in the body. These nineteen elements comprise the fine body.

Q. What is the real cause of birth?

A. Desire.

Q. If that is so then is birth limitless?

A. Yes, So long as you have desire, you have to take birth again and again.

Q. When will this infinite circle of birth and deaths end?

A. When all desires will terminate. That is the stage of salvation.

Q. What is the casual body?

A. Casual body is ignorance which brings you new birth.

Q. How does casual body leave during death?

A. Since casual body is the cause of birth, it starts functioning by breeding desires which will give a new birth.

Q. How does the next life start?

A. When causal body breeds desire, the next life starts then and there. But the desire needs fine body and a physical body in order to make itself effective. So, according to the nature of the desire, the fine body and the physical body, must be constituted. Though the seed for the next life is already there, new birth has to be delayed until the required body and mind along with suitable parentage are ready. In other words, when all these above-mentioned bodies are ready, only then a new birth is possible.

Q. What is meant by suitable parentage?

A. Where you will get all opportunities to fulfill the purpose of your present birth.

Q. How does the soul (Jeeva) leave the body during death?

A. The finer portions of the organs, i.e., eye, ear, tongue, etc., merge into the mind, and the mind merges into the Prana or vital energy, and the Prana into the soul, and the soul leaves the body during death.

Q. What road does the Jeeva or fine body take after death?

A. There are two roads, one leading to the Supreme, and the other brings you back to the world. The Bhagavad Gita in 24th and 25th verses of the eighth chapter says: "The seer takes the path to the realm of fire, light, daytime, bright fortnight, the Sun's northern passage and eventually reaches the Supreme. And the path of smoke, night-time, dark fortnight and the Sun's Southern passage leads the Yogi and the virtuous people to lunar light where they stay for a certain length of time according to their karma and then return to rebirth."

Q. Where do sinners go?

A. They are destined to suffer either taking low birth or going in some dark region after death.

Q. How do people feel during death?

A. Seers realize God, and the virtuous leave the body with comfort and happiness.

Q. What about the material people and the sinners?

A. They have no end of suffering during the time of death. No suffering of the life-time can be compared with death-time suffering. They are as it were, squeezed in the iron wheel, or thrown into the fire, or torn as under, or lost sight, or carried in the sky and thrown in the sea or turned in the whirl pool like straw (Vasist Ramayan 3:54).

WHETHER MAN'S RETROGRESSION IN ANIMAL LIFE IS POSSIBLE

Q. After passing through different stages and births when one has been able to rise to the human life can he go back to lower birth again?

A. If he does low actions he will have to go back.

Q. Will he go back as low as to the animal stage?

A. Yes. He is already animal, as he behaves like an animal. Only his outward appearance remains as human; this, too, will change into an animal in the next birth.

Q. Does it not sound illogical that man will become animal?

A. It may. But man's behaviour like animal sounds illogical too.

Q. What are the other factors which can make man animal?

A. When one is busy with sensuous things, he ordinarily breeds more and more desires which also need to be fulfilled. The only possible way that one can experience that extremely lustful and sensuous state is through an animal body.

Q. Is it not too hard a punishment?

A. Yes, but not so hard as eternal hell.

Q. Is not this kind of retrogression against the theory of evolution?

A. No. This retrogression is only a temporary arrangement; though the sinner will be under penalty, yet he will be marching on the road of evolution.

Q. How long has one to remain in an animal life?

A. It depends upon the nature and degree of sin which one has committed.

Q. Coming out from animal life once, can he become animal again?

A. If he is not careful, he may. Why animal? He may become worse! Everything depends upon his actions.

Q. In that kind of animal life, can he pray to God?

A. Popular belief is this that animal life is for experience only. For higher activities like praying, etc., he has to wait for human life; still, there might be exceptions.

Q. Can a man be reborn as a woman or vice-versa.

A. Yes.

Q. Can man or animal become a tree in a future life or vice-versa.

A. Yes, according to Karma.

SCRIPTURES

Q. What is the main scripture of the Hindus?

A. Vedas.

Q. Is it an ordinary book?

A. No, it is a revealed scripture.

Q. To whom was it revealed?

A. To devas named - Agni, Aditya, Vayu, Angiras.

Q. What is the meaning of Veda?

A. The word Veda means knowledge, and literally it is a book of wisdom.

Q. How many Vedas are there?

A. There are four Vedas, viz., Rig, Saam, Yajur and Atharva.

Q. In what language the Vedas were written?

A. Sanskrit.

Q. What do the different Vedas contain?

A. All the four Vedas contain high philosophical and divine knowledge; still Rig Veda is mainly for Hymns, Yajur Veda is for sacrificial formulas, Saam Veda is for sacrificial songs and Atharva Veda is for scientific formulas.

Q. What is the age of Vedas?

A. The position of the Vedas is quite different from that of other revealed scriptures. Saayanaacharya, the great commentator of the Vedas, says, "*Yo Vedebyah akhilam jagat nirmaame*", that is, God created this world with the wisdom and knowledge of the Vedas. That is to say that the knowledge found in the Vedas is eternal. Yet, in the beginning of each cycle of creation the knowledge of the Vedas is revealed. In this cycle the Vedas were first revealed to the Devas - Agni, Aditya, Vayu and Angiras. After that the knowledge was revealed to the Rishis, who are called 'Mantra-drastaa', like Vishwaamitra, Vaibaswata Muni, Vashishtha, Baama Deva (all revelation did not take place at the same moment) in the beginning of man's creation, that is during the Vaibaswata Manvantar, age of which is 120,533,030 years. This implies that 120,533,030 years is the age of the literary form or present word-form of the Vedas, though in knowledge-form it was revealed in the beginning of 'Aadi sristi' (1,972,940,030 years ago) to the deities - Agni, Aditya, Vaayu and Angiras. Of course, this is the orthodox view of Arya Samaj, Swami Vivekananda and ourselves; while the view of other Indian scholars vary from two lacs of years to ten thousands years. But, western scholars whose attempts have always been to bring down the age of Indian civilisation say that the age of the Vedas cannot be older than 1500 B.C.

Q. What are the final words (Maha Vakyam) of Vedas?

A. They are: "Tat Twam Ashi" means, Thou are that.

"Aham Brahmasmi" means, I am Brahma.

"Ayam Aatmaa Brahma" means, This Soul is Brahma.

"Prajnaanam Aanandam Brahma" means, 'Brahma is Knowledge and Bliss.'

Q. What are the Upavedas?

A. They are four, e.g., Ayurveda composed by Rishi Dhanwanttari for science of medicine. Dhanurveda by Rishi Viswaamitra for archery. Gandharvaveda by Narad for art of music and Artha Shastra for arts and crafts.

Q. How many Vedaangas are there?

A. There are six Vedaangas viz.

(1) Shiksha - Phonetics.

(2) Vyakaarana - Grammar.

(3) Nirukta - Vedic Glossary.

(4) Kalpa - Ritual.

(5) Chhanda - Metre.

(6) Jyotisha - Astrology.

Q. What is the Upanishad?

A. Upanishad is the knowledge portion of Vedas.

Q. How many Upanishads are there?

A. There are 108, but 11 are main: Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitiriyaa, Taitiriyaa, Shwetashwatar, Chhaandogya, Brihadaaranyaka.

Q. What is Bhagavata Gita?

A. Bhagavata Gita is the teachings of Lord Krishna written by Vyasa Deva and is a part of the Mahabharat.

Q. What is Mahabharat?

A. Mahabharat is the life story of two Indian royal dynasties by the names of Pandvas and Kauravas and also of Lord Krishna.

Q. What is Ramayana?

A. Ramayana is the life story of Sri Ramchandra written by Valmiki and later by Tulsidas.

Q. What is Bhagavata?

A. Bhagavata is the life story of Lord Krishna.

Q. How many Upangas are there?

A. There are four, viz., (1) Puranas, (2) Nyaya, (3) Mimamsa and (4) Dharma-Shastras.

Q. How many Indian schools of philosophy or Darshana are there?

A. There are six, viz., Yoga by sage Pantanjali for development of body and mind, (2) Nyaya by sage Gautama, dealing with logic, (3) Sankhaya by sage Kapila, dealing with Nature and Spirit, (4) Vaishesika by sage Kanada, dealing with atomic theory, (5) Purva Mimaansha by sage Jaimini, dealing with rituals and (6) Uttar Mimaansha or Vedaanta or Brahma Sutra by the sage Baadraayana, dealing with Upanishads.

Q. What do Puraanas deal with?

A. The Puraanas deal with creation, destruction Genealogy of gods and Patriarchs, and the history of Manus and some royal dynasties.

Q. How many Puraanas are there?

A. There are eighteen, viz., Brahma, Padma, Brahmanda, Agni, Vishnu, Garuda, Brahmavaivarta, Shiva, Linga, Naarad, Skanda, Markandeya, Bhavishyat, Matsaya, Varaah, Kurma, Vamana and Bhagavat.

Q. What are the Dharma Shastras, and how many are there?

A. There are 20 in number. The most important is Manu Samhita which is the basis of Hindu law; others, too, deal with Canons worked out by different sages.

These are the names of Dharma Shastras: Manu, Vishnu, Yajnavalkya, Angiras, Apastambhas, Kaatyaayana, Paraasara, Sankha,

Daksha, Satapatha, Atri, Harita, Usanas, Yama, Samavarta, Brihaspati, Vyasa, Likhita, Gautama and Vasishta.

Q. Have all these texts been written in Sanskrit?

A. Yes, All, besides the Tulsidas Ramayana which is in Hindi.

Q. Is the Sanskrit language very old?

A. Yes. It is the mother of all Indo-European languages.

Q. Why do Hindus have so many scriptures?

A. From time to time different sages and wise persons have recorded their spiritual experiences in these scriptures. Those spiritual records collected from the time of antiquity have increased the number of religious texts. The varieties of Hindu scriptures are able to meet the needs of people of different tastes and stages.

FESTIVALS, CEREMONIES AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Q. What are the main festivals of the Hindus?

A. The main festivals of the Hindus are: Holi, Dipavali, Ramnavami, Shiv-Ratri, Durga Pooja, Janmastami, and the main ceremonies are Mahabir Jhanda, Suryapooran, Hawan, Satya-Narayan Katha.

Q. All are the ceremonies for one Supreme God?

A. Yes. They are directed to one Supreme God.

Q. Are these festivals purely spiritual?

A. These festivals can be called socio-religious functions, for you invite some families and friends who must be looked after, and that takes much attention.

Q. Are not these festivals taken up with non-essential parts of ritualism?

A. That is festival! In festivals and ceremonies it is expected to be so. Again, what is non-essential for one may be essential for others. It depends upon your nature and what kind of rituals you choose. Different things are meant for different stages.

Q. Is there no ritual which is devoted more for absolute divinity?

A. Yes. There is Shiv-Ratri, or any Puja which is done lonely and devotedly and without any motive. They lead you far in spirituality; you may even realise God in such pursuits.

Q. Is there anything of higher stage?

A. Yes. Jap, meditation, Yoga and Samadhi.

Q. What is Jap?

A. Jap is the repetition of God's name.

Q. Is it necessary to keep the number of repetitions?

A. Yes.

Q. How should the number be kept?

A. With the help of rosary or finger mark.

Q. What should one think of during Jap?

A. Think about God's grace.

Q. What is meditation?

A. To fix the mind on God with perfect attention for a longtime.

Q. What is Yoga?

A. Yoga is to develop body and mind simultaneously.

Q. What is Samadhi?

A. Samadhi is deepest meditation: Savikalpa and Nirvikalpa. In Savikalpa Samadhi, you have the experience of mind. In Nirvikalpa Samadhi, you will be identical with the Absolute Soul: mind and intellect will have no existence: everything will be merged into the Great Soul.

Q. What is the meaning of Shiv Ratri?

A. An auspicious day when one's prayer to Lord Shiva can be answered quickly.

Q. What is the significance of Diwali?

A. A lighting festival during Mahalakshmi worship: and to mark

the return of Lord Rama from the forest to Ayodhya; and to mark the defeating of the demon Narkasur by Lord Krishna.

Q. What is the significance of Holika?

A. The burning of Prahalad's wicked aunt whose name was Holika.

Q. What is the meaning of Ram Navami?

A. Lord Ram's birthday which falls on the ninth (Navami) day from the New Moon.

Q. What is the meaning of Krishna Janam or Krishna Ashtami or Janamashtami?

A. Lord Krishna's birthday which falls on the 8th day from the full moon.

Q. What is Kali Pooja?

A. Kali is worshipped as the creative force of God. Killing of animals is a distorted practice. Paramhansa Ramakrishna and another Saint Ramprasad, worshipped Kali without killing animals.

Q. What is Kriya Yoga?

A. It is a general term. This phrase is found the first Aphorism of Paatanjal Yoga Philosophy which says that austerity (tapasya), reading scriptures and prayer to God are Kriya Yoga.

Q. What is Aarti?

A. Aarti is a ceremonial offering of love and devotion to the Lord. This is also a “welcoming prayer” to the Lord. Some auspicious symbols are used in this prayer. The symbols used represent the five primeval elements of creation - earth, water, fire, air and ether. Incense and flowers represent the earth; water in the conch-shell represents water element; five lights represent fire; fan is the symbol of air, and blowing of the conch-shell with which we start Aarti is the symbol of ether (aakash).

FAMILY LIFE

Q. How do the Hindus look at marriage?

A. Marriage is union of two souls, so insoluble.

Q. Which life is superior, that of a monk or a family man?

A. Both are equal if lived according to the prescribed laws of dharma.

Q. What is pativrat dharma?

A. Entire devotion of a wife to her husband.

Q. What are the duties of children towards parents and vice-versa?

A. Children must practise implicit obedience to their parents who in turn must return love and affection and must set a fine example to be followed.

Q. What is caste system?

A. Caste system is one of the three sections of one whole scheme of the Varnashram Dharma:

1. Chaturvarga - four objects of life: Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire) and Moksha (salvation).
2. Chaturashrama - four stages of life: Brahmcharya (student life), Garhastya (family life), Vanaprastha (retired life), Sanyasa (monastic life).
3. Chaturvarna - four castes: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra.

These three sections are so interwoven with each other that you cannot single out one from the rest and judge its merits and de-merits one side - you got to look at the entire scheme. In the caste system is found the allotment of professions for different classes. As it was forbidden to intrude in other peoples' profession, this system did not allow bone-shaking competition between man and man - the curse of modern civilization. This system also did not offer opportunity to a few wealthy persons to control market and make small people slave to their shoes.

Though Hinduism is ashamed of its untouchability, and modern India is trying to eradicate this black spot, yet the fact remains that India, like North America and Australia, did not annihilate the untouchables or the native tribes. And, also, unlike the propagators of Inquisition (when about 10,000 non-Catholics were killed on religious ground) and six-million Jews-annihilation (during the last world war) Hindus were able through this Caste system to assimilate the untouchables, the Aboriginal tribes and even some invaders, and gave them their respective places in the Hindu society.

It has also to be remembered that the absence of hard competition due to regulated control in professional affairs has offered the Hindus immense opportunity for spiritual pursuits, and many untouchables thereby were able to elevate themselves to the stage of sainthood. These saints, though of untouchable origin, are adored by all classes of Hindus, even by the Brahmins.

Q. Why the Hindus adore the Brahmins?

A. In the long history of Hinduism there was a time when Brahmins were responsible for keeping the Hindu scriptures intact by memorising them: that was before the introduction of the printing method. During the historical periods when the foreign invaders almost destroyed the Hindu scriptures it was the Brahmins who were able to reproduce new copies from memory - this vocation of memorising the scriptures by the Brahmins did not allow them to make their financial position secure.

Then, during the Hindu kingdom kingship or governmental power, in many matters, were not the final authority. The Brahmins' spiritual power or the power of the Rishis and Munis did sometime control the king's authority, and the king too did gladly obey their spiritual commands.

Again, according to caste system, Brahmin's character is one of serenity, austerity, self-control, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, wisdom, knowledge and faith in god (Gita 18:42). - all for self-denial.

Remembering such benevolence of the Brahmins, the Hindus show respect to their self-sacrificing spirit and spiritual power.

Q. What about the other Brahmins?

A. Well, they command respect according to the lives they live and professions they follow - this is no problem.

GENERAL

Q. What are the fourteen spheres according to Hindu belief?

A. The seven above are: Bhuh, Bhuvah, Swah, Mahah, Jana, Tapa, Satya; and the seven below are: Atal, Vital, Satal, Rassatal, Mahatal, Talatal, Paatal.

Q. How does one see dream?

A. In sleep, when Jeeva or soul stays in the Naadi (Vein), then dream comes according to your thoughts. Sometimes some dreams have no bearing with anything - most irrelevant.

Q. What are the coverings or Kosha which hide the Soul?

A. (1) Annamaya - Physical covering; (2) Praanamaya - Organic covering (3) Manomaya - Mental covering, (4) Vijnanamaya - Covering of knowledge; (5) Anandmaya - Covering of bliss and peace

Q. What are the three main ways of salvation?

A. (1) Karma Yoga - Path of activities; (2) Jnaana Yoga - Path of Knowledge; (3) Bhakti Yoga - Path of devotion.

Q. How many pilgrim places are there for the Hindus in India?

A. Fifty-eight.

Q. What are the main ones?

A. (1) Jagannath Puri in Orissa in East India; (2) Dwarka in Gujrat in West India; (3) Badree Naarayan in Uttarakhand, North West Himalaya; (4) Setubandha Rameshwaram in South India; (5) Kashi or Banaras in Uttar Pradesh; (6) Gaya in Bihar for offering prayer for the dead; (7) Prayag or Triveni or Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh; (8) Hardwar in Uttar Pradesh, (9) Brindaban in Uttar Pradesh where

Lord Krishna spent His early days; (10) Mathura in Uttar Pradesh where Lord Krishna was born; (11) Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, birthplace of Lord Rama; (12) Kurukshetra in Haryana, where Mahabharat War was fought and where Lord Krishna delivered the immortal teachings of Bhagawad Gita.

Q. What are the sacred rivers for the Hindus?

A. Ganges (extending from North India to East India); Jamuna (in Uttar Pradesh); Narmada (in Central India); Brahmaputra (in Assam); Godavari (in Maharashtra).

Q. Who was Buddha and what did he do?

A. Buddha was a prince in India in 500 B.C. He left his Kingdom and became a Monk. After attaining salvation, he founded Buddhism which was once accepted by two-thirds of the World's population.

Q. Who was Sankaracharya? What did he do?

A. Sankaracharya was the greatest of Indian Philosophers. He was born in Kalady (Kerala), 1200 years ago. He studied Veda at the age of eight, became a monk at sixteen and within his short life of thirtytwo years he re-established Sanatan Dharm in India.

Q. What is the opinion of Charvakas?

A. They preached Materialism in India.

Q. Is it right to kill animals for food?

A. No. There will be retribution in the next life. (Bhagavat 2:5:5:14).

Q. Do trees have souls?

A. Yes.

Q. What is sin?

A. A conscious error.

Q. Should we cut vegetables for food?

A. For the preservation of our bodies, we must take something.

Preferably which has the least manifestation of soul, e.g., vegetables, fruits, etc.

Q. Is suicide a sin?

A. Yes.

Q. Where are heaven and hell?

A. Opinions differ in this matter. The Upanishads state that there are various regions in the universe which may be called heaven or hell. Others say that heaven and hell are nothing but the different conditions in life.

Q. Who is entitled to have Janeva (Sacred Thread)?

A. The person, who can maintain its sanctity in all its details and can practise Janeva rites with sincere observances in his daily life, is entitled to have Janeva.

Q. What is Maya?

A. Maya is the creative force of God. Its work is to cut the finite form from the infinite God. For the same reason Maya has the power of deluding people.

Q. How did the Hindus get their language?

A. God declared in the Gita 10:33 that among all the alphabets He is 'A' (ah). 'A' (ah) is the beginning of all sounds, for we know that as soon as one opens one's mouth the first sound one can make is 'A' (ah). The other Sanskrit alphabets are formed by twisting the tongue in different ways and touching by it various parts of the mouth. The fact that 'A', the origin of our letters, comes from God, makes God the originator of our language.

Q. Why do the Hindus attach so much importance to Shraadh Karma?

A. Shraadh Karma is an attempt to have relationship between the dead and the living. The system of Sharadh also helps the Hindus to maintain a feeling of gratitude towards their forefathers, and this gratitude in turn comes back to their families and make the family-

members grateful and loving to each other. Besides, when a man dies, he continues to live in a subtle body for some time till he is reborn. While waiting for rebirth he suffers untold agony which is relieved by offering of love and affection (Shraadh Karma) from its relatives on earth. Shraadh or prayer for the dead is observed by other people too, only in different ways.

Q. What is Karma?

A. Karma means action, and there are different kinds of action: (a) Individual Karma, in which an individual alone is involved; (b) Social Karma, in which the family and the society are involved; (c) In national Karma the whole country is involved; and (d) Cosmic Karma entangles larger sections of humanity during earthquakes, floods, etc.

Q. Why should we be affected by the Karma of other people?

A. Our own past Karma makes us to be born in a particular family, society and country, and it is only fair that we should share the sorrows and happiness of the people we live with.

Q. Do evil spirit exists?

A. Yes. Evil spirit is the spirit of a person who lived an undesirable life in the past incarnation.

Q. What is Yoga and who is Yogi?

A. Yoga is to be in union with God - that is the highest kind of Yoga. Next kind is to develop body and mind by means of physical poses. (asanas) and meditation. Karma-yoga, Jnan-yoga, and Bhakti-yoga are also different roads to realise God. Yogi is one who practices Yoga.

THIRD EYE

Q. What is third eye or spiritual eye?

A. Third eye is not anything physical. It is just the attaining of wisdom which can enable one to see things far and in a spiritual way.

Q. Why do the Hindus worship God in so many ways?

A. If God is infinite, methods of His worship can be infinite too. Besides, like other creedal religions which have fixed ways of worship, and which may not suit all the followers, Hinduism does not object to varieties of worship so that people of different stages can find their own suitable methods.

Q. Sometimes we see that the Shivaalaya is built outside the main temple. Why is this?

A. Hindus believe that Lord Shiva resides on the Kailas, mountain, not in any house and that a structural temple is not necessary to establish this deity.

Q. Why do some of the Hindu deities have more than the usual number of head and hands?

A. This helps us to comprehend that Great Deity has innumerable heads, hands feet and eyes extended everywhere (Gita 13:14). Many heads and hands, etc., of a deity help us to think His all-pervading nature.

Q. Why are the Hindu Gods married?

A. In order to sublimate the institution of marriage, Hindu Gods are married; and this sublimation of marriage will build a strong foundation of family life, want of which is bringing unending trouble in Western families.

Q. Who invented the numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10)?

A. It Is the Hindus who invented the numerals; and this is now a universally accepted fact.

Q. What is the contribution of Hindus towards Mathematics?

A. Hindus very early evolved a simple system of Geometry (for laying out the open-air site of the Havan ground) and devised a rudimentary algebra and invented the numerals.

Q. Are you supporting the present state of the caste system?

A. We are only describing the ideal state of the caste system.

Q. What does Lord Krishna really mean when He says: in the Gita, 4:13, that God has created four varnas or castes?

A. Lord Krishna means to say that the division of four castes is a natural factor in human society. As are found among the Hindus Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaisya, Sudra, so are found in any society of any country - intellectuals and saintly persons; warriors or fighters; men of commercial abilities and tendencies; and humble men who can serve the society best with their manual labour. These four divisions of labour or allotment of duties have always existed in human society. Again, this fourfold spirit is more or less found in every human being. There is no man who is not endowed at the same time with some divine tendencies, and a capacity to struggle with inward or outward forces, and some amount of commercial tendencies and a spirit of service before, it can rightly be said that this fourfold division had been created along with man.

Q. How does the question of Birth come into this division of labour which is set according to one's action and tendency?

A. In order for a man to specialise in one particular type of profession it is better to cultivate it from his very childhood, and this will be more convenient when he follows the profession of his father. Law of caste, therefore, is the Law of heredity.

Q. What about the different trades in Hindu society?

A. "The trade guilds and caste act as mutual assurance society, and under normal conditions allow none of their members to starve", says Sir. W. Hunter.

Q. Is there any other advantage in following the profession of one's father?

A. By following the ancestral profession one can save one's energy which can be spent in spiritual pursuits. To concentrate one's energy in other professions, is to "sell away one's powers of Self-Realization or sell one's soul for a mass of pottage". And also, this system prevents the open competition between man and man which

makes the rich richer and the poor poorer - the curse of modern civilization. The Law of Caste or Varna is, therefore, not a human invention but a Law of Nature, which is ever present and at work like Newton's Law of Gravitation. It was left for the Hindus to discover the Law of Varna. "By their discovery and application of certain Laws of Nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency (Varna Dharma) have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the World has achieved", says Gandhi.

Q. But how can one progress if there is no competition?

A. Progress in what way? In material pursuits? Indulging in covetousness? And at the cost of others? That is where caste system puts an obstacle and curbs worldly ambitions. "The present seems to be an agitation of highway robbery. There cannot be millions of millionaires", remarks Gandhi.

Q. Does not competition help to bring out better production?

A. You can compete with those who are in the same trade with you, but not with other tradesmen. If you are allowed to encroach on any trade you like, you will kill the humble ones and monopolise the market.

Q. If a Sudra possesses a Kshatriya's quality, should he not be allowed to take up the profession of a Kshatriya?

A. He can surely serve his country by being a soldier, but as a voluntary worker; for his living he must, follow his father's footsteps.

Q. But if a Sudra possesses the qualities of a Brahmin, should he not be called a Brahmin?

A. A Sudra who is gifted with the true qualities of a Brahmin will show his humility - a genuine sign of spirituality - by continuing to be called himself a Sudra instead of fighting for the label of a Brahmin, for this kind of mentality brings nothing but disharmony in the society. The Hindus have always adored the true spiritual person

even if he is an untouchable; examples are Sheori, Dharma Vyad, Ruhidas, Kavir, and too many more to mention. In the next life he will be born as a Brahmin.

Q. What about a Brahmin who does not live an ideal life?

A. This is no problem. Nobody will respect an unworthy person be he a Brahmin or a Sudra.

Q. Should an unworthy man be allowed to carry on a holy profession?

A. If any unworthy person is given the opportunity to carry on a holy profession, it will only reveal the character of the person who engages him - both are of the same level. You get the kind of leader you deserve.

Q. If you believe in caste system, you do not then believe in equality?

A. Equality in what respect? In appearance, in intellectual power, in mental outlook? No two persons are equal. True Equality is something which can be discovered only in the level of Universal Soul or Paramatma which is same everywhere. The law of caste system aims to lead people to the Realisation of that Inner Equality.

Q. What about Equal Distribution of Wealth?

A. This slogan, too, is an absurdity. Equal Distribution of Wealth and open competition (facilitated by science and technology) are contradictory to each other, specially at a time when there is no check on covetousness. But the caste system of ancient India reached the nearest fulfillment of Equal Distribution of Wealth by imposing a sort of regulated control in all professions and trades through age-long tradition and faith. This allowed the humble people to carry on their respective trades as free men in the blissful atmosphere of their sweet homes instead of being-crushed by the open competition of the wealthy people or turning into a soul-less machine of the factory and living in the slum area of industrial development, - this makes them prey to cheap luxury even with hungry stomachs.

Q. How and when does one become a Patita or fall from one's caste?

A. When a Sudra encroaches on the profession of Brahmin and vice versa, both are patita.

Q. What about that simile found in the Rig Veda Samhita, 10.90.12, that Brahmins have been created out of mouth of the Supreme Being, the Kshatriyas out His arms, the Vaisyas out of His thighs and the Sudra out of His feet? does not this idea encourage inequality?

A. No. Gandhi says that no simile could be happier than this one. If all castes are parts of one body, then parts are needed to maintain the body.

Q. Yet, the very idea that Brahmins are created from mouth gives them superior status.

A. Gandhi says "Brahmanism is the culmination of the other Varnas, just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service".

Q. How did the caste system manage the foreigners who settled in India?

A. Professor Sir S. Radhakrishnan says: "Hindu leaders accepted primitive societies and foreign settlers such as the Greeks and the Scythians into the Hindu fold and recognized their priestly families as Brahmins and their fighting men as Kshatriyas".

Q. Is it possible to follow the caste system in the present age?

A. The purpose of the whole scheme of the Varnashram Dharma, in which the caste system is one section, was to lead the people towards divinity. If all the nations of the world accept this great ideal, the caste system may not be an impossible thing even now.

Q. Was not the caste system responsible for inviting the foreigners in India in 1193 A.D.?

A. No, not the caste system. The family quarrel between King

Pithwiraj and his cousin, and the kindliness of King extended to the invader that brought the foreigner to the Delhi throne.

Q. But surely the caste system made the Hindus weak?

A. No. Look at History "The Arabs had become an all conquering nation. They conquered Egypt and Syria within six years of the death of Mohamed, Persia within ten years, Africa and Spain in one year each, and Turkistan in eight years. But they did not succeed in conquering India, within three hundred years. It was by the successive efforts of three nations, viz: Arabs, Turks and Pathaans, for five hundred and fifty years that India lost her independence" - Bankim Chatterjee. Again: "What nation on earth would have maintained the semblance of civilization, the spirits or the customs of their forefathers, during so many centuries of overwhelming oppression but one of such singular character, as the Rajput Hindu? How did the Britons at once sink under the Romans and invain strove to save their groves, their Druids or their altars of Bal from destruction! To the Saxons they alike succumbed; and this heterogeneous to the Normans. Empire was lost or gained by a single battle and the laws and religion of the conquered merged in those of the conqueror. Contrast with these the Rajput Hindus; not an iota of their religion and customs have they lost, though many an acre of land" - Col. Todd.

Q. Is Brahma Jnan only for the Brahmins?

A. No. Anybody can acquire that Supreme Wisdom.

Q. Name some of the non-Brahmins who elevated themselves to the status of true Brahmin by the strength of their Tapasya.

A. Jabala; Satyakam; Kavasha; Aitareya; Vyas; Parashara; Vashishtha; Vishwamitra, etc.

Q. Who is the ideal Brahmin?

A. Gita says (18:42) "Brahmin's character is one of serenity, austerity, self-control, purity, forgiveness, righteousness, wisdom, faith in God".

Q. Why the Hindus attach so much importance to family life?

A. Because it is the pivot of their society. It is a wonderful system to train and guide oneself through ups and downs of life and ultimately to lead to the Realization of God.

Q. Why so much restriction on arranging a Hindu marriage, particularly in choosing bride or a bride groom?

A. These restrictions aim at exercising self-restraint; and from here the intended married couple gets the training of self-control. Hinduism is essentially a religion of renunciation.

Q. Why are there so many restrictions on Hindu woman's life?

A. Because woman's life is priceless in a Hindu family. Hindu adores her as a goddess, and so hates to see her as an object of fun. She is, therefore, protected under restriction and this fact reveals self-restraint on the part of all concerned.

Q. In comparison with God, what is a husband to a wife?

A. In family relation, the husband is supreme over wife (a wife is also a Laxmi to a husband and parent over a son); but this does not take away the Sovereignty of God. But when one is anxious to respond to the call of God or Humanity, family consideration may be secondary.

Q. How was it possible for men to be born of the first Rishis who were bachelors?

A. Probably through the Will of these first-born-Rishis just as they were born from the determination of God alone.

Q. Who was first born? Man or animal?

A. Animal, Man comes after, for the more the soul aspires to be elevated, the more it takes time to pass through the evolutionary process.

Q. Are not the Hindus too much otherworldly in comparison with Christianity?

A. Christ's teaching is the same. Jesus said, "Go and sell whatso-

ever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Mark X. 17-22).

Q. Why is Ganges water so pure to the Hindus?

A. Apart from the religious tradition attached to it, there is some scientific reason: Ganges water is always free from harmful Bacteria.

Q. Does God forgive sin?

A. It is God's command that one must pay for what one has done. Yet, God can forgive a sinner provided he repents and imposes the hardest possible punishment upon himself for his sinful act, and then makes a strong promise not to commit it again, and above all, if he always prays to God with sincerity and Love.

Q. Why do the Hindus worship Hanuman who was a monkey?

A. There are two opinions on this point: (a) Hanuman was not a monkey, but a man. 'Hanuman' was his family title. Even in these days we see among Indian people Hanuman family, Singh (means Lion) family, Parbat (means Mountain) family, and among English people Fox family, Stone family, etc. Hanuman was his family name. He could speak pure Sanskrit. He was a great devotee and he was also a great Yogi, who had supernatural powers so that he could go anywhere; he could make himself small or big or could take any form. It is through the family title 'Hanuman', he came to be known as such. His tail symbolizes his great following, for followers always walk behind the leader to be looked like a tail. (b) Even if Hanuman was a monkey, there is no harm in worshipping him, he was the embodiment of faith. He tore his breast and showed that the name of God was inscribed there. What Hanuman did to serve the Lord even endangering his life, was impossible for anybody to do. Such a being, whether man or animal, attracts our adoration automatically. Again, Hanuman is the Incarnation of Lord Shiva. Adoration of an animal should not sound unreasonable at a time when wealthy people spend their fortune on their dogs.

Q. Why do the Hindus worship the Elephant God that is Ganesh?

A. The Elephant head is symbolical. As an elephant is big in body, so is Ganesh great in intelligence. Again Ganesh is Lord of mass - Gana means mass or multitude; Isha means Lord. For this reason, Hindus worship Ganesh before they start any work.

Q. What was the idea of being a Sati? Was it not a suicide?

A. It was unbearable for the faithful wife to enjoy life when the husband died, so she chose to sit on the pyre by the side of the dead husband - an idea based on highest sacrifice; it was not therefore sinful. However, changed circumstances have abolished the system.

Q. Why did hundreds of Rajput Hindu women jump in fire?

A. To save their chastity from being molested by the foreign invaders - unprecedented in history.

Q. What is the specialty of the Sanskrit language?

A. Prof. Basham says: "One of ancient India's greatest achievements is her remarkable alphabet, commencing with the vowels and followed by the consonants, all classified very scientifically according to their mode of production, in sharp contrast to the haphazard and inadequate Roman alphabet, which has developed organically for three millennia. It was only on the discovery of Sanskrit by the West that a science of phonetics arose in Europe".

Q. Who is the greatest Hindu Grammarian?

A. Panini. Prof. Basham says about his grammar. "... there is no doubt that Panini's grammar is one of the greatest intellectual achievements of any ancient civilization, and the most detailed and scientific grammar composed before the 19th century in any part of the world".

Q. Did the Hindus develop in Science?

A. A Syrian Monk, Severus Sebokht (A.D. 662) says: "I shall

now speak of the knowledge of the Hindus.... of their subtle discoveries in the science of astronomy - discoveries even more ingenious than those of the Greeks and Babylonians - of their rational system of mathematics, or of their method of calculation which no words can praise strongly enough - I mean the system using nine symbols. ..."

Q. Did Hindus develop in medicine too?

A. Prof. Basham again "... the compendia of Charaka (1st-2nd centuries A.D.) and Susruta (c. 4th century A.D.) - are the products of a fully evolved system which resembles those of Hippocrates and Galen in some respects, and in others has developed beyond them".

"... Indian surgery remained ahead of European until the 18th century, when the surgeons of the East Indian Company were not ashamed to learn the art of rhinoplasty from the Indians". Hindus used to use 127 kinds of knives for the purpose of operation.

Q. Did the Hindus have any University in ancient times?

A. Surely, they had Odantpuri; Kashi; Kanchi; Nalanda; Takshashila etc. The Takshashila University (600 B.C.) produced students like Panini, Charaka and others. Nalanda University had 10,000 residential students and 1,000 residential monk - teachers.

Q. Was Hinduism preached outside of India?

A. Yes. In Java, Sumatra. etc., in the East Indies and also in Mexico in Central America.

Q. Is it necessary to call a priest for daily prayer?

A. No. Any body can pray to God independently.

Q. Do the animal can gather neither sin nor virtue, for its life is only to experience the result of its actions done in past lives?

A. No. An animal can gather neither sin nor virtue, for its life is only to experience the result of its actions done in past lives.

Q. Is not a person selfish who spends his time in Tapasya for Salvation?

A. He is no more selfish than an university student who is absorbed in higher studies. When a Tapaswi has attained Salvation, he becomes a Light to humanity.

Q. Why is Gayatri Mantra so important?

A. Gayatri Mantra is found in the Rik Veda, and its Seer is Rishi Viswamitra. From that ancient time this Gayatri Mantra has been repeated by millions of Hindus; and that is how the Gayatri Mantra became so powerful.

Q. Why is Jap so effective?

A. By constant repetition, a Mantra acquires infinite power to dispel ignorance.

Q. What are the Chakras and the Kulakundalini?

A. The Chakras are the centres of consciousness in different parts of the body, and the Kulakundalini is the power which arouses that consciousness - they don't have any physical existence and they belong to Tantra School of philosophy.

Q. What is Panch yajna ? What is its purpose?

A. The purpose of Pancha yajna is to guide man in his attempt to get rid of all sins he may commit knowingly or unknowingly.

Pancha yajna is five kinds of yajna or sacrifice to be done everyday: (1) Deva yajna - worshipping God or performing Havan; (2) Rishi yajna - to read scriptures written by Rishis; (3) Pitri yajna - offering prayer for forefathers; (4) Nri yajna - serving mankind; and (5) Bhuta yajna - serving animal and vegetable kingdom. Service to all - From God, down to plants.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q. Is there any ancient city in India of which historicity has been accepted by the Western scholars?

A. Two cities by the names of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa have been discovered underground about which Sir John Marshal says:

"... have established the fact that in the third millennium before Christ, and even before that, the peoples of the Punjab and Sind were living in well-built cities and in possession of a relatively mature culture with a high standard of art and craftsmanship and a developed system of pictographic writing".

Q. Can man die untimely?

A. No. Any kind of death at any time should be taken as destined, that is, timely.

Q. What about the deaths by accident?

A. According to Hindu view there is no accident. This is the law of cause and effect. Nothing can happen without cause.

Q. Is death by suicide destined too?

A. Yes. Cause of suicide is evident and its effect must come.

Q. What about the deaths in war? Is it not the soldiers who cause a war; then, why should they suffer?

A. But the soldiers chose that particular vocation, and it is their past Karma which causes them to be born in that particular country which wages war. So, nobody else is responsible for the catastrophe.

Q. If everything is pre-destined like that, then why should anybody make an attempt for any improvement?

A. Pre-destination is just an effect of some past cause. Remove the cause and there will be no suffering.

Q. Which is stronger, pre-destination or free-will?

A. Your free-will in the past produces some action which in turn brings you what looks like destiny; this must be experienced. Apply your free-will now, future course will change.

Q. It looks then, as though there are different kinds of karma?

A. Yes, there are three kinds of karma: Prarabdha (past karma); Kriyaman (Karma, which you are doing now); Sanchita (karma, which you will do in future).

Q. Can a single karma be responsible for one's birth?

A. Ordinarily not. But, in some very rare cases it might be possible.

Q. Which karma can cause a birth?

A. The ones which are matured to bear fruits.

Q. Can the planets do any good or harm to us?

A. Planets actions affect us collectively, not individually. But the movements of some planets may sometimes indicate some future events in the lives of certain individuals.

Q. Then, why the reading of horoscope and doing those sort of things?

A. Just to please one-self.

Q. Is faith-healing good?

A. So long as it does not encourage commercialism.

Q. What is Guna?

A. Guna is quality - Sattwa, Rajah, Tamah. Guna is inherent in the very nature of creation. Karmas are always guided by Gunas.

Q. Do Gunas act on dying man too?

A. Oh, he is worse off! Having no strength to struggle he is an easy prey to the Gunas. Gita says (14:15,16): Death in Sattwa Guna causes a sinless birth, death in Rajah Guna brings an active life and death in Tamah Guna is responsible for one's low birth.

Q. Why is suicide a sin?

A. It indicates the worst cruelty. It is an attempt to escape from the hardships of life; and it also has a tendency to encourage others in the same situation to act in the same way.

Q. What would be the punishment of suicide?

A. A worse life in future and the lowering of the soul.

Q. How to prevent suicide?

A. By preaching the doctrine of re-birth.

Q. What happens to the physical body after death?

A. The different elements of the body, like water, fire, etc., mix with the corresponding elements outside.

Q. Can an evil spirit do any harm?

A. No, for it has no physical body.

Q. Why do people fast?

A. Either for health or penance or prayer.

Q. What is the Spiritual Science?

A. It is a method by which one can acquire some supernatural powers, e.g., to become small, to become light, to read minds, etc.

Q. Did the Hindus learn to build Hospitals from the Christian Missionaries?

A. No. The Emperor Asoka had built many hospitals 300 years before Christ.

Q. Why did not the Hindus progress in Science like the Western scientist?

A. Because they were not dedicated to science as they were to religion.

Q. Why do the Hindus adore cow?

A. Because cow's milk is the only food that contains all the properties needed for human life and therefore unavoidably necessary - she is like a mother.

Q. Why does the Gita teach that You, the Soul, do not die?

A. Because you cannot think of your own death - this is one of the many proofs of the Immortality of the Soul.

HOUSE-WIFE'S DUTY

Q. What would be the ideal way that a house-wife should follow daily?

A. Before leaving bed she should say a short prayer.

Q. What an ideal Hindu wife should do before entering the kitchen?

A. Best thing for her would be to bathe before she starts cooking, and while bathing she should say the bathing prayer.

Q. Is not bathing before cooking too much an orthodox system specially in the Western countries?

A. Because of Western environment which often brings obstacle she should be more careful to maintain the Hindu atmosphere at home.

Q. What is the true purpose of bathing before cooking?

A. House-wife should remember that the food she is going to cook is supposed to bring health and happiness and, above all, to develop godliness in the lives of her husband and children and her other dear ones including herself and whosoever will eat that food. What a great and noble duty this is! And to fulfill this highest duty housewife should not mind bathing before cooking (She will in any case bathe later in the day, but instead, let her bath now)

Q. In failing to do so what else can she do in this direction?

A. Next best thing for her would be to use a fresh clean dress or Sari before entering the kitchen.

Q. Should she do anything else in this way while she will be cooking?

A. A house-wife should repeat God's name in her mind at the time of cooking so that the cooked food will be more sanctified.

Q. What would be her next duty?

A. Housewife's next duty would be to serve her husband and children with food with an attitude of service and sacrifice creating an atmosphere of blissfulness.

Q. What then?

A. Now, when those who have to go out, have left home, she should bathe (if she has not bathed before) and take time to do Puja and

Aarti and Jap and reading o scriptures and such other things.

Q. Would it be a sin if she being hungry after the strenuous work of cooking takes tea or something of the sort before she starts Puja and prayer?

A. If she is hungry, she must take something, there is no sin in it.

Q. How can she do puja if she has small children?

A. Well, she will have to accept what comes in life, at the same time she must seek opportunity to do puja. And the children too will get some training in religious line.

Q. What are the other ways she can train her children in this matter?

A. While doing the house-work and the cooking she can sing Dhoons (hymns with God's names) and make the children follow her. That would be the best training for the children.

Q. What comes next?

A. In the afternoon the house-wife can read the Ramayan or the Mahabharat in companion with or in front of her mother-in-law or sister-in-law or such neighbours, and of course with her children. This reading of Ramayan can well develop into a small Family-RamayanReading group.

Q. What are her other tasks?

A. In the afternoon when her husband comes from work she should take care of his comforts and convenience - this would be, apart from some kindly consideration, an indication of her faithfulness to her husband.

Q. What then?

A. Evening time is very important in an ideal Hindu family. She should light the Diya saying the lighting-prayer. In her authority as a housewife she would be able to bring every inmate in the home to the family altar in order to sing the evening-prayer. When parents sit for prayer children will sit. To make this evening-prayer sweet and

attractive, sufficient musical instruments should be used. Housewife must see that the children wash their hands and feet before they come to Puja.

Q. Has not the house-wife some duty towards her children's home-study?

A. Surely, she must rule and control her children so that they put their minds in study.

Q. Should not the children show some respect to their parents?

A. Oh, that is a 'Must'. The mother, after the prayer is finished, will tell her children to bow down before their father and herself. That is the greatest training for the children.

Children must also be taught to bow down before the altar when they go to school.

Q. Has the mother some special duty when a child is sick at home?

A. Mother should control herself in the matter of taking food and other ways- this will go a long way in the treatment of the child.

Q. What then?

A. Children should be taught to say the short prayer before they go to bed. Parents should show example if they wish their children to pray.

Q. This whole scheme leaves an impression in the reader's mind that it is meant to keep the house-wife confined throughout the day within the four walls of her home. Is not that so?

A. No, it is not exactly like that. You may to some extent call it a confinement making a contrast with modern slogans, like 'All Freedom' and 'All Equality'. But, looking to the other side of it we may comfortably say that Hindu House-wife is rendering a wonderful service to her family and society. By her taking care of the children and the home with a spirit of Service and Sacrifice and also with patience and God-fearing attitude she can make her home an abode

of Peace and Bliss - no outside distraction can affect the men folk. The hardness of the day's struggles can be soothened by the moonlight of home, the temptation of the World can be made pale by the sweetness of the family atmosphere - that is her responsibility, bestowed by Mother Nature, in whose likeness she has been made.

Q. How the Hindus calculate the dates of Creation?

A. There is a Samkalpa Mantra which has been written in the manner that its date and time has been kept as one keeps in a diary. As a christian writes in his diary, e.g. "My baby is born at 8 o'clock in the morning of the 9th day of the month of July of the year of our Lord 1964.", and as the days go on he changes the date and the month and the year in his diary to record other happenings; no one will doubt in the accuracy of the date of the birth of his boy, for he has been keeping the record of the dates ever since. In the same way, the Hindu Rishis of ancient time by the virtue of their Wisdom and Divine Knowledge of the Vedas came to know when the creation started, and they had been recording the dates of Creation in the Samkalpa Mantra; which can well serve as a Calendar which was handed down from generation to generation till we got it. And this date of Creation according to that Sanikalpa Mantra, which is "... .. Hari Om Tat Sat... Adya Brahmanye dwitiya parardhe Sri shweta-varaha kalpe vaibaswata manwantare asta-binshati shatatame kali-yuge pratham charane Jambu-dwipe Bharatkhnade Aryavartan-targata Brahmaib deshe Vikramshatake Barahabatare bartaman yatha nania sambatsare amukayane maha-mangalya-prade masot-tame amuka mase amuka pakshe amuka tithou amuka basare...." is 1,972,740,030 years.

Q. Does not this date sound like the flight of an imagination?

A. No. Even modern science recognises that creation is very old. A Biology book 'Plant & Animal Biology' says "... earliest clearly recognizable fossils can be dated between 500 to 1,000 million years ago..." Imagine the great Wisdom of the Hindus of that ancient time which has been recognized by the modern science!

Q. Is there any record of different periods of the creation of planetary objects and earth and plant and man?

A. Yes. "During 1st Manu Swayambhu's time the star Uttanpad and Dhruva and other planets were present in the sky. During the 2nd Manu's time Swarochish the World was created, and during the 3rd Manu Outtavi's time the Moon was separated from the World. During 4th Manu Tamas's time Earth was separated from water. During the time of 5th Manu Raivat's time Vegetable was created. During the 6th Manu Chaakshush's time Animal came into existence, and during the reign of 7th Manu Vaivaswat - the present age - Man was created." Quoted from Vaidic Sampatti.

Q. Which are the other Manus to come in future?

A. Savarnik, Dakshu Savarnik, Brahma Savarnik. Dharma Savarnik. Rurda Savarnik, Deva Savarnik. Indra Savarnik - one after another.

Q. What is the duration of Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kali yuga?

A. Satya yuga 1,728,000 years,
Treta yuga 1,296,000 years,
Dwapar yuga..... 864,000 years,
Kali yuga 432,000 years.
up to 2013 Kali yuga has finished 5,113 years.

Q. How to practice Religion?

A. Doing Jap (Repetition of God's name) everyday. To attend or do Puja or Arti every morning or evening. To sing Bhajan everyday. To do meditation and concentration and some yoga practices (Asans, etc.). Practice of silence, vigil and physical exercises. Practising thought on death and self culture (analysis of body and soul). Doing breathing exercises.



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